PRESS RELEASE

Massachusetts, Rhode Island, BOEM Award $1.1 Million for Regional Fisheries Studies to Guide Offshore Wind Development

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Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs

MEDIA CONTACT

Craig Gilvarg, Press Secretary

Phone

617-372-6704 (tel:6173726704)

Online

craig.gilvarg@mass.gov (mailto:craig.gilvarg@mass.gov)

BOSTON — The Baker-Polito Administration, in partnership with the State of Rhode Island and the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM), today announced grants worth $1.1 million to four institutions to support regional fisheries studies that will collect data vital to the ongoing development of the offshore wind industry in North America. The first-in-the-nation studies will conduct important research on recreational and commercial fisheries, seabed habitat, and comparable offshore wind policies in Europe.

“Collaborating with our state and federal partners to support these studies will help us better manage fisheries and natural habitats, while positioning the offshore wind industry to stimulate economic development and deliver clean, affordable energy to Massachusetts,” **said Governor Charlie Baker.**

“The data collected through these regional studies will help inform offshore wind development, protect fisheries and marine wildlife, and ensure our fishing industry continues to thrive,” **said Lieutenant Governor Karyn Polito**.

The first-in-the-nation studies will advance the assessment of the interactions between offshore wind development and fisheries in the northeast. The five studies will generate important information and data during the pre-construction period for the region’s first offshore wind projects, and will help establish baseline datasets on fisheries and seabed habitat. The studies will also advance new and uniform methodologies for ongoing data collection and analysis.

"The continued success of offshore industries in the United States requires strong coordination and consultation with our state partners,” **said BOEM Acting Director Walter Cruickshank**. “The studies announced today will help ensure BOEM has sufficient baseline information to support its environmental assessments of offshore wind projects on the Atlantic OCS.”

“Rhode Island is a proud partner in this landmark effort to conduct regional scientific studies on fisheries resources prior to the start of any offshore construction activities,” **said**

Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management Director Janet Coit. "It is clear that the science on offshore wind development impacts in the US is in its early stages, and regional baseline data for the areas slated for wind development are lacking, especially with regards to potential impacts to Rhode Island's fishing industry. The selected studies will help to fill some of these data gaps and allow for informed decision-making while paving the way for meeting Rhode Island's renewable energy goals and advancing climate mitigation efforts."

The initiative will support and inform a broader regional fisheries science and monitoring program being developed under the Responsible Offshore Science Alliance (ROSA), an entity established by the fishing community, offshore wind leaseholders, and federal and state agencies.

With funding from the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center (MassCEC) ($496,688), the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management ($200,000), and BOEM ($400,000), a coalition of state and federal resource agencies, the fishing community, and offshore wind leaseholders helped to develop a competitive process to solicit proposals addressing science and data gaps in regional offshore wind development. The studies will be managed by MassCEC in coordination with BOEM, the National Marine Fisheries Service, and Massachusetts and Rhode Island fishery resource agencies.

The program focuses on three priority areas of research: fishery resource studies, seafloor habitat studies, and technical studies. These priority areas were informed by work led by the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) to develop a comprehensive framework for a broad fisheries science and monitoring program, with input from federal, state, and industry stakeholders.

"As offshore wind advances in the Northeast, it is imperative that we ensure it is developed in an environmentally responsible manner that maintains shared use for our maritime industries," **said Energy and Environmental Affairs Secretary Kathleen Theoharides.** "These studies will expand our knowledge of fisheries, habitats, and migration patterns in the wind energy development areas, helping to avoid and minimize potential effects of construction and operation."

“Offshore wind presents an opportunity to develop an abundant amount of clean, renewable energy while creating jobs and economic opportunity in coastal communities,” **said MassCEC CEO Stephen Pike.** “By taking a proactive, comprehensive approach to environmental monitoring and data collection, we can position the offshore wind industry to realize a more efficient approach to development.”

The four institutions receiving funding are:

INSPIRE Environmental – Acoustic Telemetry for Highly Migratory Species, with the New England Aquarium and Standard Approaches for Acoustic and Imagery Data - $443,450:

INSPIRE will conduct a two-year acoustic tagging and tracking study of highly migratory species such as tuna and sharks at popular recreational fishing spots in the wind energy areas, in order to provide new baseline data on highly migratory species. This will enable ongoing assessment of the impact of offshore wind on highly migratory species and associated recreational fishing. INSPIRE will also develop standard approaches to synthesizing, visualizing and disseminating high-resolution acoustic and imagery data for mapping of seabed habitat in the wind energy areas. This will advance baseline characterization of the seabed environment and make high-resolution mapped data available to stakeholders in a web-based, vetted and neutral forum.

University of Massachusetts Dartmouth (UMD) – Net Survey for Larval Lobster and Fish Neuston, with Massachusetts Lobstermen’s Association - $278,592:

UMD will conduct towed net surveys for larval lobster and fish neuston (small fish organisms) throughout the wind energy areas. This 18-month study will provide baseline information on the spatial and temporal distribution of species at their earliest life stage, during which they are transported by tides and currents.

University of Rhode Island (URI) – Fishing Status Using Vessel AIS Data and Machine Learning, with Rhode Island DEM - $249,646:

URI will merge electronic and other data on fishing vessel activity into a single data set and apply a “machine learning” approach to enable lower cost broad-scale modeling of the

probability of fishing activity in a given area. This will allow researchers to identify where and when vessels are actually fishing, as opposed to being in transit.

New Bedford Port Authority – Comparative Analysis of Regulation in Europe and Japan - $125,000:

The New Bedford Port Authority will work with a consultant to conduct a comparative analysis of policies regarding coexistence of commercial fishing with existing offshore wind in Europe and emerging policies in Japan. The study is intended to establish a fact-based and broadly accepted narrative in this area.

Working with input and guidance from states and other stakeholders through a multi-year planning process, BOEM identified the Massachusetts/Rhode Island Wind Energy Area, located in federal waters on the outer continental shelf. The area was divided into seven lease areas, which were secured by four offshore wind developer teams through competitive auctions.

"We deeply appreciate the agencies' support of critically important research to better understand the impacts to fisheries from offshore wind energy development," **said Annie Hawkins, Executive Director of the Responsible Offshore Development Alliance**. "These four regional studies were carefully selected to improve the existing knowledge base and we're especially glad to see fishermen's direct inclusion in their design and implementation. We look forward to their advancement."

"The breadth of these studies will go a long way to help improve our understanding of the potential interactions between offshore wind and fisheries," **said Lyndie Hice-Dunton, Ph.D. Executive Director of the Responsible Offshore Science Alliance**. "It is great to see this regional interagency coordination in support of fisheries research and we look forward to seeing the outcomes of these innovative, collaborative projects."

In August 2016, Governor Baker signed into law bipartisan **comprehensive energy diversification legislation** (/news/governor-baker-signs-comprehensive-energy-diversity-legislation) requiring utilities to competitively solicit and contract approximately 1,600 megawatt (MW) of offshore wind, leading to Massachusetts' selection of the **800 MW Vineyard Wind project** (/news/project-selected-to-bring-offshore-wind-energy-to-the-commonwealth) in 2017 and the

804 MW Mayflower Wind project (/news/project-selected-to-increase-offshore-wind-energy-in-the-commonwealth) in 2019. In 2017, Rhode Island selected a 400 MW project proposed by Ørsted. In total, six projects have been selected for power sales contracts from the lease area. The projects are at various stages of permitting review, and while each project will have fisheries monitoring requirements relevant to the specific windfarm area, there is wide consensus that studies and monitoring are needed on a regional basis to examine long-term interactions between offshore wind, fisheries resources and fishing activity.

The studies receiving funding address species of interest for both commercial and recreational fishing, across a wide range of wind energy areas. These studies will also provide new and synthesized data where little or none exists today. The technical studies are designed to advance new, lower cost approaches to mapping fishing activity, while assessing how offshore wind and fishing intersect and are regulated in other regions.

"This is an exciting opportunity to harness the power of innovation, regional collaboration, and data-driven analysis to propel us towards our energy future while ensuring we protect our vital fisheries and wildlife," **said Senate President Karen E. Spilka (D-Ashland).**

"It is vital to balance our need to develop offshore wind with our longtime fishing industry, which is an important local food source," **said House Speaker Robert A. DeLeo (D-Winthrop).** "These grants will help us understand how to make these two industries interact in a way that makes a healthier, more prosperous Commonwealth."

"Developing increased amounts of offshore wind generation of electricity is critical for the future of our state and our region, but so is protecting and strengthening our commercial fisheries, which provide a protein resource we can't afford to lose," **said Senate Minority Leader Bruce Tarr (R-Gloucester).** "The information derived from this research will provide important insight into how to maximize the potential of both marine resources and minimize conflict and harm to each of them."

"The fishing industry has played a significant role in our state and regional economies for generations," **said House Minority Leader Bradley H. Jones, Jr. (R-North Reading).** "As Massachusetts and Rhode Island continue to pursue offshore wind as a renewable and sustainable source of clean energy, it is important that we understand exactly how the

construction and operation of these facilities will impact recreational and commercial fisheries. The studies funded through these grants will provide critical information that can be used to help ensure this technology is developed in a responsible way that does not harm our fisheries and marine life."

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Media Contact

Craig Gilvarg, Press Secretary

Phone

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Online

craig.gilvarg@mass.gov (mailto:craig.gilvarg@mass.gov)

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